

Dear Honorable Members of the Commerce Committee,

As someone cared for abandoned and abused rabbits for more than 30 years in Connecticut and Massachusetts, I am extremely upset about HB 5263, An Act Concerning the Processing of Rabbits for Consumption. I do not understand why anyone's tax dollars in Connecticut or elsewhere should be spent to promote the killing of rabbits, the third-most popular pet in this country after cats and dogs. I have witnessed over the years that rabbits are wonderful companion animals — smart and sociable with unique personalities. That's why I have continued my involvement in promoting their humane care in New England after moving to Northern New York nearly three years ago.

Due to public demand, many cosmetic companies no longer test on rabbits, many furriers no longer produce coats made from the pelts of rabbits, and laws have been passed that disallow the sale of commercially bred rabbits in pet stores. Industry leaders PetSmart and Petco no longer sell rabbits. A few years ago, when Whole Foods tried selling rabbit meat, vigorous public outcry resulted in the discontinuation of the sale of rabbit meat by Whole Foods and other stores. HB 5263 is a giant step backward for the protection of companion animals.

Another concern is that if passed, HB 5263 may exacerbate spread of Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease (RHDV), a highly transmissible and fatal disease for wild and domestic rabbits that is spreading across the country.

In light of the emerging viral threats that jump the species barrier from animals to humans, Connecticut's Department of Agriculture should instead be promoting plant-based markets, including expansion and innovation of plant-based proteins (and eventually cultivated meat), to ensure a greater availability of more diverse, safe, and dependable protein sources.

Thank you,

Vernon Hill
Copenhagen NY